Wilkie Collins

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Wilkie Collins

Born	January 8, 1824 Marylebone, London
Died	September 23, 1889 (aged 65) London
Period	1840s-1880s
Genres	fiction, drama
Signature	

William Wilkie Collins (8 January 1824 – 23 September 1889) was an English novelist, playwright, and author of short stories. He was very popular during the Victorian era and wrote 30 novels, more than 60 short stories, 14 plays, and over 100 non-fiction pieces. His best-known works are *The Woman in White*, *The Moonstone*, *Armadale* and *No Name*.

Collins was a lifelong friend of Charles Dickens. A number of Collins's works were first published in Dickens's journals *All the Year Round* and *Household Words*. The two collaborated on several dramatic and fictional works, and some of Collins's plays were performed by Dickens's acting company.

Collins predicted the deterrence concept of mutually assured destruction that defined the Cold War nuclear era. Writing at the time of the Franco-Prussian War in 1870 he stated, "I begin to believe in only one civilising influence – the discovery one of these days of a destructive agent so terrible that War shall mean annihilation and men's fears will force them to keep the peace." [1]

Biography

[edit] Early life

Collins was born at 11 New Cavendish Street, Marylebone, London, the son of a well-known Royal Academician landscape artist, William Collins. Named after his father, he swiftly became known by his second name (which honoured his godfather, David Wilkie). The family moved to Pond Street, Hampstead, in 1826. In 1828 Collins's brother Charles Allston Collins was born. In 1829-30 the family moved twice, first to Hampstead Square and then to Porchester Terrace, Bayswater. In 1835 Collins began attending school at the Maida Vale academy.[2]

From 1836 to 1838 [3] he lived with his parents in Italy and France, which made a great impression on him. From 1838 to 1840 he attended Mr. Cole's private boarding school in Highbury. At this school he was bullied by a boy who would force Collins to tell him a story before allowing him to go to sleep. "It was this brute who first awakened in me, his poor little victim, a power of which but for him I might never have been aware... When I left school I continued story telling for my own pleasure" Collins later said.[4]

In 1840 the family moved to 85 Oxford Terrace, Bayswater. In 1841 he left school and was apprenticed as a clerk to the firm of tea merchants Antrobus & Co. Collins's first story "The Last Stage Coachman" was published in the Illuminated Magazine in August 1843. In 1844 he traveled to Paris with Charles Ward. That same year he wrote his first novel, *Iolani, or Tahiti as It Was; a Romance*. In 1845 *Iolani* was submitted to Chapman and Hall, but it was rejected. The novel went unpublished during his lifetime.[2] Collins said of the novel: "My youthful imagination ran riot among the noble savages, in scenes which caused the respectable British publisher to declare that it was impossible to put his name on the title page of such a novel." It was during the writing of this novel that Collins's father first learned that his assumptions that Wilkie would follow him in becoming a painter were mistaken.[4]

In 1846 he entered Lincoln's Inn to study law on the initiative of his father who wanted him to have a steady income. After his father's death in 1847, Collins produced his first published book, *Memoirs of the Life of William Collins, Esq., R.A.* published in 1848. The family moved to 38 Blandford Square soon after, where they used their drawing room for amateur theatricals. In 1849 Collins exhibited a painting, "The Smugglers' Retreat", at the Royal Academy summer exhibition. His novel, *Antonina, or the Fall of Rome* was published by Richard Bentley in February, 1850. Collins went on a walking tour of Cornwall with artist Henry Brandling in July and August of 1850.[2] Collins managed to complete his legal studies, and was finally called to the bar in 1851. Though he never formally practiced law, he used his legal knowledge in many of his novels.[4]

[edit] Career

An instrumental event in Collins's career occurred in March 1851,[3] when he was introduced to Charles Dickens by a mutual friend, the painter Augustus Egg. They became lifelong friends and collaborators. In May of that year Collins acted with Dickens in Edward Bulwer-Lytton's play *Not So Bad As We Seem*.[2] Collins's story "A Terribly Strange Bed", his first contribution to Household Words, appeared in April, 1852. In May of 1852 he on tour with Dickens's company of amateur actors. Collins's novel *Basil* was published by Bentley in November. He stayed with Dickens in Boulogne from July to September, 1853, afterwards touring Switzerland and Italy with Dickens and Augustus Egg from October to December. Collins published his novel *Hide and Seek* in June of 1854.[2]

Portrait by Rudolph Lehmann, 1880

During this period Collins extended the variety of his writing, publishing articles in George Henry Lewes's paper *The Leader*, short stories and essays for *Bently's Miscellany*, dramatic criticism, and the travel book *Rambles Beyond Railways*.[4] His first play, *The Lighthouse* was performed by Dickens's theatrical company at Tavistock House in 1855. His first collection of short stories, *After Dark*, was published by Smith, Elder in February 1856. His novel *A Rogue's Life* was serialised in Household Words in March 1856. He joined the staff of Household Words in October 1856. In 1857 his play *The Frozen Deep* was performed by Dickens's company. Collins's novel *The Dead Secret* was serialised in Household Words from January to June 1857 and published in volume form by Bradbury & Evans. Collins's play *The Lighthouse* was performed at the Olympic Theatre in August. *The Lazy Tour of Two Idle Apprentices*, based on Dickens's and Collins's walking tour in the north of England was serialised in Household Words in October 1857.[2]

In 1859 Collins began living with Caroline Graves and her daughter. Caroline came from a humble family, having married young, had a child, and been widowed. Collins put Caroline down as his wife in the census of 1861, though they were never married.[4] His collection of short stories *The Queen of Hearts* was published in October 1859. His novel *The Woman in White* was serialised in All the Year Round from November to August 1860. In 1861 he visited Whitby in North Yorkshire with Caroline Graves. He resigned from the staff of *All the Year Round* in January 1862. He began to suffer seriously from rheumatic gout in 1862. His novel *No Name* was serialised in All the Year Round from March to January 1863. At the beginning of 1863 he travelled to German spas and Italy for his health with Caroline Graves. His novel *Armadale* was serialised in the Cornhill Magazine from November to June 1866. His play *No Thoroughfare*, co-written with Dickens, was published as the 1867 Christmas number of All the Year Round, and dramatised at the Adelphi Theatre on December 26.[2]

His search for background information for *Armadale* took him to the Norfolk Broads and the small village of Winterton-on-Sea. Here he first met and began a liaison with Martha Rudd, a 19-year-old girl from a large poor family. A few years later she moved to London to be closer to him. His novel *The Moonstone* was serialised in All the Year Round from January to August 1868. His mother, Harriet Collins, died that same year. During his writing of *The Moonstone*, while he was suffering an attack of acute gout, Caroline left him and married a younger man named Joseph Clow. Caroline had wanted to marry Collins, but he had resisted. Collins began using opium at this time for his gout pain, an addiction that lasted for the rest of his life.[4]

Collins's and Martha Rudds's daughter Marian was born in 1869. After two years of marriage, Caroline left her husband and returned to Collins. Collins divided his time between Caroline, who lived with him at his home in Gloucester Place, and Martha who was nearby. When he was with Martha he assumed the name William Dawson, and she and their children used the last name of Dawson themselves. This arrangement continued for the rest of Collins's life.[4] In 1870 his novel *Man and Wife* was published. This year also saw the death of Charles Dickens. Collins's second daughter with Martha Rudd, Harriet Constance was born in

1871. *The Woman in White* was dramatised and produced at the Olympic theatre in October 1871. His novel *Poor Miss Finch* was serialised in Cassell's Magazine from October to March 1872. His short novel *Miss or Mrs?* was published in the 1872 Christmas number of the Graphic. His novel *The New Magdalen* was serialised from October 1872 to July 1873. His younger brother Charles Allston Collins died later in 1873.[2] Charles had married Dickens's younger daughter, Kate. Collins also advised Dickens's sister-in-law, Georgina Hogarth, when she was editing *The Letters of Charles Dickens from 1833 to 1870* (published in 1880) with Dickens's daughter Mary Angela Dickens.

In 1874 Collins toured The United States and Canada giving readings of his work. Collins's and Martha Rudd's son, William Charles, was born in 1874. His novel *The Law and the Lady* was serialised in the Graphic from September to March 1875. His short novel *The Haunted Hotel* was serialised from June to November 1878. His later novels include *Jezebel's Daughter* (1880), *The Black Robe* (1881), Heart and Science (1883), and *The Evil Genius* (1886). In 1884 Collins was elected Vice-President of the Society of Authors, founded by his friend and fellow novelist Walter Besant.[2]

Collins's Grave in Kensal Green Cemetery

Collins died on September 23, 1889 at 82 Wimpole Street, following a paralytic stroke. He is buried in Kensal Green Cemetery, West London. His grave marker describes him as the author of *The Woman in White*.[5] Caroline Graves died in 1895 and was buried with Collins. Martha Rudd died in 1919. Collins's last novel *Blind Love*, left unfinished at his death, was finished and published by Walter Besant in 1890.[2]

[edit] Works

Collins's works were classified at the time as 'sensation novels', a genre seen nowadays as the precursor to detective and suspense fiction. He also wrote penetratingly on the plight of women and on the social and domestic issues of his time. For example, his 1854 *Hide and Seek* contained one of the first portrayals of a deaf character in English literature. As did many writers of his time, Collins published most of his novels as serials in magazines such as Dickens's *All the Year Round* and was known as a master of the form, creating just the right degree of suspense to keep his audience reading from week to week. Sales of *All The Year Round* increased when *The Woman in White* followed *A Tale of Two Cities*.

Collins enjoyed ten years of great success following publication of *The Woman in White* in 1859. His next novel, *No Name* combined social commentary – the absurdity of the law as it applied to children of unmarried parents (see Illegitimacy in fiction) – with a densely plotted revenge thriller. *Armadale*, the first and only of Collins's major novels of the 1860s to be serialised in a magazine other than *All the Year Round*, provoked strong criticism, generally centred upon its transgressive villainess Lydia Gwilt; and provoked in part by Collins's typically confrontational preface. The novel was simultaneously a financial coup for its

author and a comparative commercial failure: the sum paid by *Cornhill* for the serialisation rights was exceptional, eclipsing by a substantial margin the prices paid for the vast majority of similar novels, yet the novel failed to recoup its publisher's investment. *The Moonstone*, published in 1868, and the last novel of what is generally regarded as the most successful decade of its author's career, was, despite a somewhat cool reception from both Dickens and the critics, a significant return to form and reestablished the market value of an author whose success in the competitive Victorian literary marketplace had been gradually waning in the wake of his first "masterpiece". Viewed by many to represent the advent of the detective story within the tradition of the English novel, *The Moonstone* remains one of Collins's most critically acclaimed productions, identified by T. S. Eliot as "the first, the longest, and the best of modern English detective novels...in a genre invented by Collins and not by Poe",[6] and Dorothy L. Sayers referred to it as "probably the very finest detective story ever written".[7]

Various factors (most often cited are the death of Dickens in 1870 and thus the loss of his literary mentoring; Collins's increased dependence upon laudanum; and a somewhat ill-advised penchant for using his fiction to rail against social injustices) appear to have led to a decline in the two decades following the success of his sensation novels of the 1860s. His novels and novellas of the 1870s and 1880s, while by no means entirely devoid of merit or literary interest, are generally regarded as inferior to his previous productions and receive comparatively little critical attention today.

The Woman in White and *The Moonstone* share an unusual narrative structure, somewhat resembling an epistolary novel, in which different portions of the book have different narrators, each with a distinct narrative voice (*Armadale* has this to a lesser extent through the correspondence between some characters). *The Moonstone*, being the most popular of Collins's novels, is considered a precursor to detective fiction, such as Sherlock Holmes.

After *The Moonstone*, Collins's novels contained fewer thriller elements and more social commentary. The subject matter continued to be sensational but his popularity declined. Algernon Charles Swinburne commented: "What brought good Wilkie's genius nigh perdition?/Some demon whispered—'Wilkie! have a mission.'[8]

[edit] Bibliography

Portrait by John Everett Millais, 1850

See also:Category:Novels by Wilkie Collins and Category:Plays by Wilkie Collins

- *Iolani, or Tahiti as it was. A Romance* (written 1844; published 1999)

- *Memoirs of the Life of William Collins, Esq., R.A.* (1848)
- *Antonina* (1850)
- *Rambles Beyond Railways, or, Notes in Cornwall taken a-foot* (with illustrations by Henry C. Brandling; 1851)
- *Basil* (1852)
- *Mr Wray's Cash Box* (1852)
- *Hide and Seek* (1854)
- *The Ostler* (1855)
- *After the Dark* (1856)
- *The Dead Secret* (1857)
- *A Rogue's Life* (1857/1879)
- *The Frozen Deep* (1857), a play co-written with Charles Dickens
- *A Terribly Strange Bed* (1858)
- *A House to Let* (1858), a short story co-written with Charles Dickens, Elizabeth Gaskell and Adelaide Anne Procter
- *The Haunted House* a short story co-written with Charles Dickens, Elizabeth Gaskell, Adelaide Anne Proctor, George Sala and Hesba Stretton
- *The Queen of Hearts* (1859)
- *The Woman in White* (1860)
- *No Name* (1862)
- *My Miscellanies* (1863)
- *Armadale* (1866)
- *No Thoroughfare* (1867), a story and play co-written with Charles Dickens
- *The Moonstone* (1868)
- *Man and Wife* (1870)
- *Poor Miss Finch* (1872), dedicated to Frances Minto Elliot
- *Miss or Mrs?* (1873)
- *The New Magdalen* (1873)
- *The Frozen Deep and Other Stories* (1874)
  - "The Frozen Deep"
  - "Dream Woman"
  - "John Jago's Ghost; or The Dead Alive"
- *The Law and the Lady* (1875)
- *The Two Destinies* (1876)
- *The Haunted Hotel* (1878)
- *The Fallen Leaves* (1879)
- *My Lady's Money* (1879)
- *Jezebel's Daughter* (1880)
- *Who Killed Zebedee?* (1881)
- *The Black Robe* (1881)
- *Heart and Science* (1883)
- *I Say No* (1884)
- *The Ghost's Touch and Other Stories* (1885)
- *The Evil Genius* (1886)
- *The Guilty River* (1886)
- *Little Novels* (1887)
- *The Legacy of Cain* (1889)
- *Blind Love* (1890 – unfinished, completed by Walter Besant)

[edit] Films based on his novels

Photograph by Napoleon Sarony, 1874

- *Basil* (UK 1998)
- *The Woman in White* (UK 1997)
- *The Moonstone* (UK 1996)
- *Zhenshchina v belom* (*The Woman In White*, Russia 1982)
- *The Woman in White* (UK, TV, 5 episodes, 1982)
- *La donna in bianco* (Italy, TV, 1980)
- *Lucilla* (*Poor Miss Finch*, Germany, 1979, 2 episodes, directed by Wilhelm Semmelroth)
- *Der Monddiamant* (*The Moonstone*, Germany 1974, 2 episodes, directed by Wilhelm Semmelroth)
- *Great Mysteries* (1 Episode: *A Terribly Strange Bed*, USA 1973)
- *Der rote Schal* (*Armadale*, 3 episodes, directed by Wilhelm Semmelroth)
- *La pietra di luna* (*The Moonstone*, Italy 1972)
- *The Moonstone* (UK, 5 episodes, 1972)
- *Die Frau in Weiß* (*The Woman in White*, 3 episodes, Germany 1971, directed by Wilhelm Semmelroth)
- *The Policeman and the Cook* (USA 1970)
- *La femme en blanc* (*The Woman in White*, France 1970)
- *La dama vestida de blanco* (*The Woman in White*, Spain 1967)
- *The Woman in White* (UK, 6 episodes, 1966)
- *A Terribly Strange Bed* (USA 1991)
- *Dow Hour of Great Mysteries: The Woman in White* (USA 1960)
- *The Moonstone* (UK, 7 episodes, 1959)
- *Hour of Mystery: The Woman in White* (UK 1957)
- *Sergeant Cuff kann den Mondstein nicht finden* (*The Moonstone*, Germany 1955)
- *Suspense: The Moonstone* (USA 1954)
- *Tales Of Adventure: The Moonstone* (USA 1952, 5 episodes)
- *Robert Montgomery Presents: The Moonstone* (USA 1952)
- *Kvinna i vitt* (*The Woman in White*, Sweden 1949)
- *The Woman in White* (USA 1948)
- *Crimes at the Dark House* (based on *The Woman in White*, USA 1940)
- *The Moonstone* (1934)
- *The Woman in White* (1929)
- *She Loves and Lies* (1920)
- *The Twin Pawns* (1919)
- *The Woman in White* (1917)
- *Tangled Lives* (1917)

- *The Moonstone* (1915)
- *The Quest of the Sacred Jewel* (1914)
- *The New Magdalen* (1914
- *The Dream Woman* (1914)
- *The New Magdalen* (1912)
- *The Woman in White* (1912)
- *The New Magdalene* (1910)

[edit] In popular culture

Wilkie Collins is the fictional narrator of the 2009 historical novel *Drood* by Dan Simmons. The book is based in part on Charles Dickens's *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*. He also appears as a fictional character in *Wanting*, a 2008 historical novel by Richard Flanagan.

Actress Sarah Jessica Parker and husband Matthew Broderick named their son James Wilkie Broderick after Matthew's father and Collins.

There are Hidden Object Games based on the *Moonstone* and *The Woman in White*.

[edit] Blue plaques

On 22 January 2011 at 10.00 am, The Ramsgate Society unveiled a blue plaque at 14 Nelson Crescent, Ramsgate to celebrate the fact that Wilkie Collins took holidays in the town of which he made references in his books. The unveiling was accompanied by a local radio interview with Radio Kent and was attended by the chairman of the Wilkie Collins Society.

[edit] References

1. ^ Baker, William (ed); Clark, William (ed) (1999). *The Letters of Wilkie Collins: 1866-1889*. Palgrave Macmillan. p. 344. ISBN 978-0-312-22344-1. http://books.google.com/books?id=MBD7AgInZgEC&pg=PA344&lpg=PA344&dq=I+begin+to+believe+in+only+one+civilising+influence+%E2%80%93+the+discovery+one+of+these+days+of+a+destructive+agent+so+terrible+that+War+shall+mean+annihilation+and+men's+fears+will+force+them+to+keep+the+peace&source=bl&ots=HEKLWWSg3b&sig=z1B16x-TLUmOV71wBA2PXecxer8&hl=en&sa=X&ei=lvYFT8LsE-7WiALzpvmBDA&ved=0CFIQ6AEwCA#v=onepage&q=I%20begin%20to%20believe%20in%20only%20one%20civilising%20influence%20%E2%80%93%20the%20discovery%20one%20of%20these%20days%20of%20a%20destructive%20agent%20so%20terrible%20that%20War%20shall%20mean%20annihilation%20and%20men's%20fears%20will%20force%20them%20to%20keep%20the%20peace&f=false. Retrieved 2012-01-05.
2. ^ *a b c d e f g h i j The Cambridge Companion to Wilkie Collins; Chronology*. Cambridge University Press. 2006. pp. xiii-xix. ISBN 0-521-84038-4.
3. ^ *a b* Catherine Peters, *Wilkie Collins: The King of Inventors*, Minerva Press, 1991 .
4. ^ *a b c d e f g* Clarke, William M. (2003). *Introduction to The Legacy of Cain*. U.K.: Alan Sutton. pp. v-x. ISBN 0-7509-0453-4.
5. ^ Kensal Green Cemetery, Grave Number 31754, Square 141, Row 1.
6. ^ Deirdre David, *The Cambridge Companion to the Victorian Novel*, Cambridge University Press, 2001, p.179.
7. ^ Sharon K. Hall, *Twentieth Century Literary Criticism*, University of Michigan Press, 1979, p.531.
8. ^ Algernon Charles Swinburne, *Studies in Prose and Poetry*, Chatto & Windus, 1915, p. 127.

[edit] Further reading

- Bleiler, Everett (1948). *The Checklist of Fantastic Literature*. Chicago: Shasta Publishers. pp. 81.
- Olive Logan's account of Wilkie Collins, web40571.clarahost.co.uk

[edit] External links

	Wikimedia Commons has media related to: ***Wilkie Collins***
	Wikiquote has a collection of quotations related to: ***Wilkie Collins***
	Wikisource has original works written by or about: ***Wilkie Collins***

- The Wilkie Collins Website
- Wilkie Collins Information Pages
- Works by Wilkie Collins at Project Gutenberg
- Wilkie Collins Collection at the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin
- Archival material relating to Wilkie Collins listed at the UK National Register of Archives
- Anonymous (1873). *Cartoon portraits and biographical sketches of men of the day*. Illustrated by Frederick Waddy. London: Tinsley Brothers. pp. 76–77. http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Cartoon_portraits_and_biographical_sketches_of_men_of_the_day/Wilkie_Collins. Retrieved 6 January 2011.
- The Ramsgate Society Website
- Portraits of Wilkie Collins at the National Portrait Gallery, London

[hide]

- v
- t
- e

Works by Wilkie Collins

Novels	• *Basil* (1852) • *The Woman in White* (1860) • *No Name* (1862) • *Armadale* (1866) • *No Thoroughfare* (1867) • *The Moonstone* (1868) • *Poor Miss Finch* (1872) • *The Dead Alive* (1874) • *The Law and the Lady* (1875) • *The Black Robe* (1881) • *Blind Love* (1889)
Short stories	• "A House to Let" (1858) • "The Haunted House" (1859) • "Who Killed Zebedee?" (1881)
Plays	• *The Frozen Deep* (1866) • *No Thoroughfare* (1867)